

Chairwoman Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education:

My name is Traci Woodard, and I am a wife and mother of six children. Two graduated from Private School, two graduated from Career Tech School, and we will have two graduate from Virtual School. My husband and I wanted a school that would partner with us in our children's education journey. We have tested and tried many platforms over a 15-year span, and the virtual platform has proven to be the most successful.

Being "Present Parents," we do not rely solely on one form of learning for our children. When our children were in a physical school building, they were expected to learn and retain information the same as their peers. They were expected to stay in a bubble and not perform above the norm or up to their potential. For example, when my daughter was in the 5th grade, she was placed in a sexual education class with middle schoolers. When I picked her up that day, she was so excited to tell me about her brothers' having a third arm. (Please do not make me explain this) My husband had to explain what sex really is, and on her level. She was not prepared for this information. When we voiced our concerns to the school, we were made to feel as if we did not know what was best for our daughter. We have never had this type of experience or reaction from a virtual school.

Many schools have a mission statement that has a catch phrase "we offer individualized learning for our students." We have only found this statement to be true through virtual learning. Although this method is not perfect, this platform has allowed us to be hands on in our children's educational track. There are less distractions, more time to spend on core courses, and limitless possibilities to explore other interests outside of books. My children have access to their learning dashboards 24/7. This allows them to work at their peak performance. When COVID hit our nation, my children did not miss a beat. At one point we had tutoring sessions in my driveway to help our neighbors who had little help from our district. While others were struggling to find help and resources, my children were thriving, and helping others.

I would ask that you consider ways to assist virtual schools in furthering their mission of serving their student populations. I am not an expert in school funding, or the laws that govern our K-12 educational system. But I do know that several changes to the budget have been proposed that will improve the way virtual schools conduct their business and create more parity in funding for virtual schools and traditional schools. As a parent with children in virtual schools I urge you to adopt these changes. My children deserve the same opportunities as any other student in this state and should not be shortchanged just because they are enrolled in a virtual school. While there are others testifying today who can speak more knowledgeably about these proposed changes, I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee about my experiences with virtual schools and their positive impact on my children.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.